

edward the dyke

and other poems

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I'm not a girl
I'm a hatchet
I'm not a hole
I'm a whole mountain
I'm not a fool
I'm a survivor
I'm not a pearl
I'm the Atlantic Ocean
I'm not a good lay
I'm a straight razor
look at me as if you had never seen a woman before
I have red, red hands and much bitterness

THE PSYCHOANALYSIS OF EDWARD THE DYKE

Behind the brown door which bore the gilt letters of Dr. Merlin Knox's name, Edward the Dyke was lying on the doctor's couch which was so luxurious and long that her feet did not even hang over the edge.

"Dr. Knox," Edward began, "my problem this week is chiefly concerning restrooms."

"Aahh," the good doctor sighed. Gravely he drew a quick sketch of a restroom in his notebook.

"Naturally I can't go into men's restrooms without feeling like an interloper, but on the other hand every time I try to use the ladies room I get into trouble."

"Umm," said Dr. Knox, drawing a quick sketch of a door marked 'Ladies'.

"Four days ago I went into the powder room of a department store and three middle-aged housewives came in and thought I was a man. As soon as I explained to them that I was really only a harmless dyke, the trouble began . . ."

"You compulsively attacked them."

"oh heavens no, indeed not. One of them turned on the water faucet and tried to drown me with paper towels, but the other two began screaming about how well did I know Getrude Stein and what sort of underwear did I have on, and they took off my new cuff links and socks for souvenirs. They had my head in the trash can and were cutting pieces off my shirttail when luckily a policeman heard my calls for help and rushed in. He was able to divert their attention by shooting at me, thus giving me a chance to escape through the window."

Carefully Dr. Knox noted in his notebook: "Apparent suicide attempt after accosting girls in restroom." "My child," he murmured in featherly tones, "have no fear. You must trust us. We will cure you of this deadly affliction, and before you know it you'll be all fluffy and wonderful with dear babies and a bridge club of your very own." He drew a quick sketch of a bridge club. "Now let me see. I believe we estimated that after only four years of intensive therapy and two years of anti-intensive therapy, plus a few minor physical changes and you'll be exactly the little girl we've always wanted you to be."

Rapidly Dr. Knox thumbed through an index on his desk. "Yes yes. This year the normal cup size is 56 inches. And waist 12 and ½. Nothing a few well-placed hormones can't accomplish in these advanced times. How tall did you tell me you were?"

"Six feet, four inches," replied Edward.

"Oh, tsk tsk." Dr. Knox did some figuring. "Yes, I'm afraid that will definitely entail extracting approximately 8 inches from each leg, including the knee-cap . . . standing a lot doesn't bother you, does it my dear?"

"Uh," said Edward, who couldn't decide.

"I assure you the surgeon I have in mind for you is remarkably successful." He leaned far back in his chair. "Now tell me briefly, what the word 'homosexuality' means to you, in your own words."

"Love flowers pearl, of delighted arms. Warm and water. Melting of vanilla wafer in the pants. Pink petal roses trembling overdew on the lips, soft and juicy fruit. No teeth. No nasty spit. Lips chewing oysters without grimy sand or whiskers. Pastry. Gingerbread. Warm sweet bread. Cinnamon toast poetry. Justice equality higher wages. Independent angel song. It means I can do what I want."

"Now my dear," Dr. Knox said, "Your disease has gotten completely out of control. We scientists know of course that it's a highly pleasurable experience to take someone's penis or vagina into your mouth — it's pleasurable and enjoyable. Everyone knows that. But after you've taken a thousand pleasurable penises or vaginas into your mouth and had a thousand people take your pleasurable penis or vagina into their mouth, what have you accomplished? What have you got to show for it? Do you have a wife or children or a husband or a home or a trip to Europe? Do you have a bridge club to show for it? No! You have only a thousand pleasurable experiences to show for it. Do you see how you're missing the meaning of life? How sordid and depraved are these clandestine sexual escapades in parks and restrooms? I ask you."

"But sir but sir," said Edward, "I'm a woman. I don't have sexual escapades in parks or restrooms. I don't have a thousand lovers — I have one lover."

"Yes yes." Dr. Knox flicked the ashes from his cigar onto the floor. "Stick to the subject, my dear."

"We were in college then," Edward said. "She came to me out of the silky midnight mist, her slips rustling like cow thieves, her hair blowing in the wind like Gabriel. Lying in my arms harps played soft in dry firelight, Oh Bach. Oh Brahms. Oh Buxtehude. How sweetly we got along how well we got the woods pregnant with canaries and parakeets, barefoot in the grass alas pigeons, but it only lasted ten years and she was gone, poof! like a puff of wheat."

"You see the folly of these brief, physical embraces. But tell me the results of our experiment we arranged for you last session."

"oh yes. My real date. Well I bought a dress and a wig and a girdle and a squeezey bodice. I did unspeakable things to my armpits with a razor. I had my hair done and my face done and my nails done. My roast done. My bellybutton done."

"And then you felt truly feminine."

"I felt truly immobilized. I could no longer run, walk bend stoop move my arms or spread my feet apart."

"Good, good."

"Well everything went pretty well during dinner, except my date was only 5'3" and oh yes. One of my eyelashes fell into the soup — that wasn't too bad. I hardly noticed it going down. But then my other eyelash fell on my escort's sleeve and he spent five minutes trying to kill it."

Edward sighed. "But the worst part came when we stood up to go. I rocked back on my heels as I pushed my chair back under the table and my shoes — you see they were three inchers, raising me to 6'7", and with all my weight on those teeny little heels . . ."

"Yes yes."

"I drove the spikes all the way into the thick carpet and could no longer move. Oh, everyone was nice about it. My escort offered to get the check and to call in the morning to see how I made out and the manager found a little saw and all. But, Dr. Knox, you must understand that my underwear was terribly binding and the room was hot . . ."

"Yes yes."

"So I fainted. I didn't mean to, I just did. That's how I got my ankles broken."

Dr. Knox cleared his throat. "It's obvious to me, young lady, that you have failed to control your P.E."

"My God," said Edward, glancing quickly at her crotch, "I took a bath just before I came."

"This oral eroticism of yours is definitely rooted in Penis Envy, which showed when you deliberately castrated your date by publicly embarrassing him."

Edward moaned. "But strawberries. But lemon cream pie."

"Narcissism," Dr. Knox droned, "Masochism, Sadism. Admit you want to kill your mother."

"Marshmellow bluebird," Edward groaned, eyes softly rolling. " Looking at the stars. April in May."

"Admit you want to possess your father. Mother substitute. Breast suckle."

"Graham cracker subway," Edward writhed, slobbering. "Pussy willow summer."

"Admit you have a smegmatic personality," Dr. Knox intoned.

Edward rolled to the floor. "I am vile! I am vile!"

Dr. Knox flipped a switch at his elbow and immediately a picture of a beautiful woman appeared on a screen over Edward's head. The doctor pressed another switch and electric shocks jolted through her spine. Edward screamed. He pressed another switch, stopping the flow of electricity. Another switch and a photo of a gigantic erect male organ flashed into view, coated in powdered sugar. Dr. Knox handed Edward a lollipop.

She sat up. "I'm saved," she said, tonguing the lollipop.

"Your time is up," Dr. Knox said. "Your check please. Come back next week."

"Yes sir yes sir," Edward said as she went out the brown door. In his notebook, Dr. Knox made a quick sketch of his bank.



I have come to claim
Marilyn Monroe's body
for the sake of my own.
dig it up, hand it over,
cram it in this paper sack.
hubba. hubba. hubba.
look at those luscious
long brown bones, that wide and crusty
pelvis. ha Ha, oh she wanted so much to be serious

but she never stops smiling now.
Has she lost her mind?

Marilyn, be serious — they're taking
your picture, and they're taking the pictures
of eight young women in New York City
who murdered themselves for being pretty
by the same method as you, the very
next day, after you!
I have claimed their bodies too,
they smile up out of my paper sack
like brainless cinderellas.

the reporters are furious, they're asking
me questions
what right does a woman have
to Marilyn Monroe's body? and what
am I doing for lunch? They think I
mean to eat you. Their teeth are lurid
and they want to pose me, leaning
on the shovel, nude. Dont squint.
But when one of the reporters comes too close
I beat him, bust his camera
with your long, smooth thigh
and with your lovely knucklebone
I break his eye.

Long ago you wanted to write poems;
Be serious, Marilyn
I am going to take you in this paper sack
around the world, and
write on it: — the poems of Marilyn Monroe —
Dedicated to all princes,
the male poets who were so sorry to see you go,
before they had a crack at you.
They wept for you, and also
they wanted to stuff you
while you still had a little meat left
in useful places;
but they were too slow.

Now I shall take them my paper sack
and we shall act out a poem together:
“How would you like to see Marilyn Monroe,
in action, smiling, and without her clothes?”
We shall wait long enough to see them make familiar faces
and then I shall beat them with your skull.
hubba. hubba. hubba. hubba. hubba.
Marilyn, be serious
Today I have come to claim your body for my own.

the harvest spider

flowers on my wall

ornately

legs stretched long and

easy as a young queen

in the park

he knows his trick

will come and meanwhile

he's not asking

In Larry's room

because it is always possible

the next egg cracked in the pan

will fly off somewhere

we go to Larry's room

unguarded

leave the crosseyed lions in the drive

their thorny paws tucked under

we must pick out

what hurts us

and discard it. for a while

in Larry's room we loose un

structured

dance electrons

free green

energy

of all the diatoms at sea

that built us

because it is always possible

we swarm into fish

and spin

and spawn

until the water is wine is

white

ecstatic skin

we drink it

and a giant leprechaun

becomes the shadow of my body

on the wall my body is

my own

reflection

if the room shines

as the head of a pin shines then

it dances

because the exhaled atoms

of my breath are

me still

I live everywhere possible

breathing swordfish and lions and

Larry

wearing Merlin's hat

breaks an egg and holds the

shell close to his ear

the 7 oceans listen

and begin to roar

and roar

and roar

Elephant poem

Suppose you have an elephant
with a 56 millimeter trunk
and say he's
tearing up the jungle
(say you think he's drunk
or crazy)
How're you going to bring that elephant down?
lion can't
bear could but don't want to
and the panther's too small for that job.

Then suppose you have an elephant
with million millimeter trunk
and his jungle is the whole green world?
(and drunk
and crazy)
you see the problem.

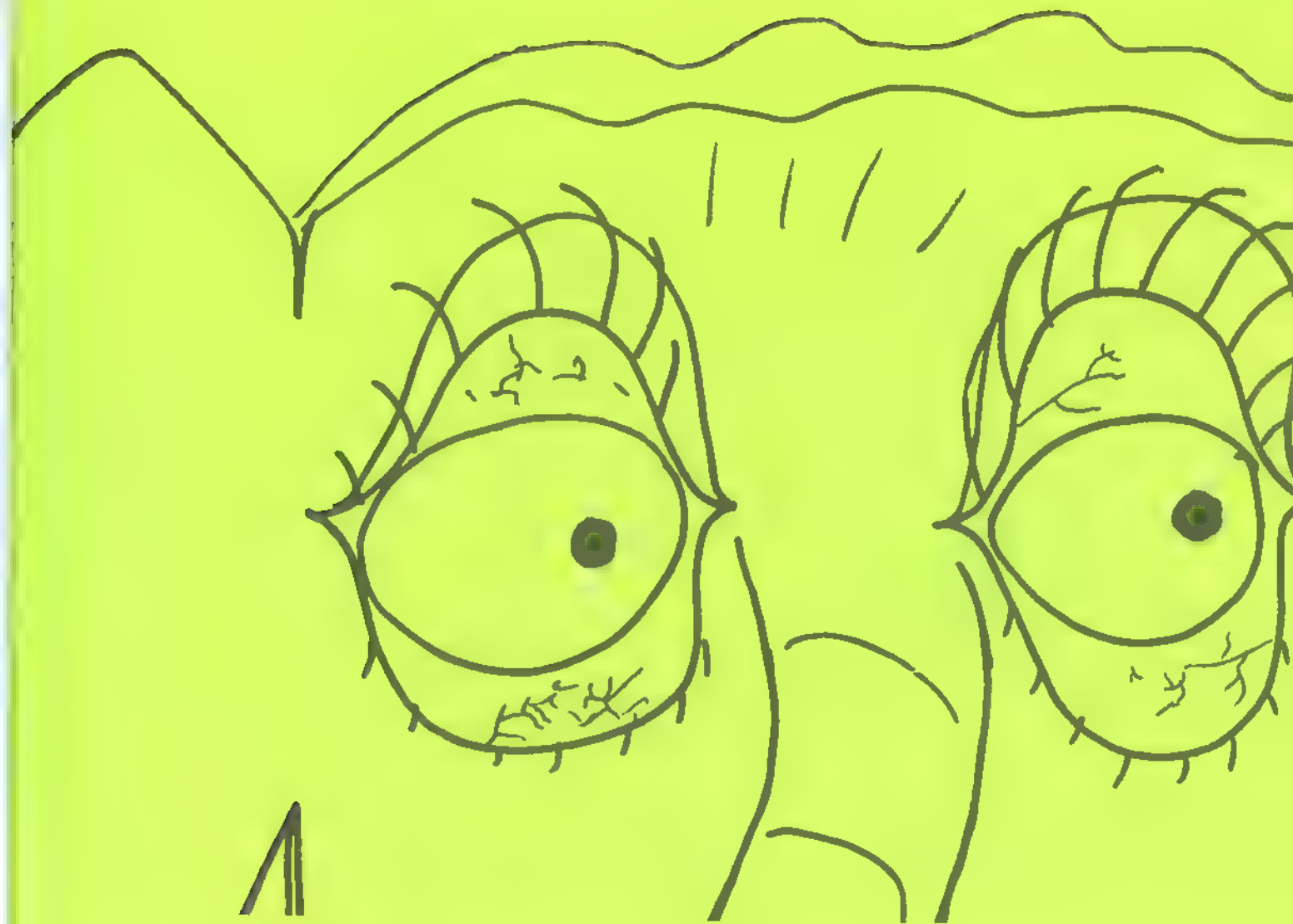
one more word
about elephants
No matter how hard they try
elephants cannot pick their noses
any more than bankers can hand out money
or police put away their pistols
or politicians get right with God.

a sty
in the elephant's eye
aint nothing
but a fly in his nose
is a serious if not fatal condition
when the fly gets into that nostril
it begins to swell
and stay closed
he cant smell cant drink cant think

cant get one up
on anybody
he begins to regret
all that flabby ammunition
hanging on him
he begins to wish
he'd been a little more bare-faced
like an ape or a fish
all those passageways
he needs to feed himself
tied up

ELEPHANT TURNED UPSIDE DOWN
by a fly
a million flies
outweigh a trunk
a tank
a bank
a million flies
outthink a pile of IBM
junk

we must be wise
to the elephant's lies
you may think we should try
to sober him up
but the trouble isn't that he's drunk
the trouble is
that he's an elephant
with multi-millimeter trunk
who believes the world is his jungle
and until he dies
he grows and grows



we must be flies
in the elephant's nose
ready to carry on
in every town
you know there are butterflies
there are horse flies and house flies
blue flies, shoo flies and it's-not-
true flies
then there are may flies and wood flies
but I'm talking about
can flies & do flies
bottle flies, rock flies and sock flies
dragon flies and fireflies
in the elephant's nose
ready to carry on
til he goes down

If this be/ the banana

take

the banana

take

the banana

Yesterday sucked up its

following Directions:

if you want to
wet yr chin
take yr face and
stick it

in

Tomorrow
aint got no tomorrow.

this is what/I love her

think of it

as silver guppies

in my stomach muscles

pieces of fruit

a day

no other



If you lose your lover
rain hurt you. blackbirds
brood over the sky trees
burn down everywhere brown
rabbits run under
car wheels. should your
body cry? to feel such
blue and empty bed dont
bother. if you lose your
lover comb hair go here
or there get another

one white tree branch
wrapped in bird toes
five crows sleeping



it feels night and summer

for Washington, D.C.

it feels night and
summer, what squeals
into the city river is
no eel, did it fool you.
sweat, get ready
breathe heavy
heat gets to you
rats, get to you cities
lord, get to you
is it the cruddy sky sets up
that sense of pending
rain

or riot

it feels anger
even air knows danger
thin white pause before
the knife speaks neat
between the ribs

between the trap of
streets the cats this night
are people.

pacing, faces strain
of waiting

rain or riot

cats: come here
lean lower, nuzzle midnight
black and vicious flower

it feels murder, clawing
martyr do not falter
do not linger
is it the siren stains
so red and
deadly, city braced for
mobs with stabbing
axes, bodies asking to be
bloodied, to be
over
drab and heavy
getting ready

it feels midnight, city lighted
skies lay cool and
mother-fingers on
our heads, our
faces taste of water
falling slow, go home
go easy, flow.
blood and breaking
next time, riot
next time flame but
not tonight be quiet
wait get ready
rain.

1966

Vietnamese woman speaking
to an American soldier

Stack your body
on my body
make

 life
make children play
in my jungle hair
make rice flare into my sky like
whitest flak
the whitest flash
my eyes have
 burned out

looking
press your swelling weapon
here

between us if you
push it quickly I should
 come

to understand your purpose
what you bring us
what you call it
there
in your country

you know her hustle
you know her white legs
flicker among headlights
and her eyes pick up the wind
while the fast hassle of living
ticks off her days
you know her ways

you know her hustle
you know her lonely pockets
lined with tricks
turned and forgotten
the men like mice hide
under her mind
lumpy, bigeyed
you know her pride

you know her blonde arms cut
by broken nickels in
hotelrooms and by razors of
summer lightning on the road
but you know the wizard
highway, no resisting so
she moves, she is forever missing

get her a stopping place
before the night slides dirty
fingers under her eyelids and
the weight of much bad kissing
breaks that ricepaper face

sun cover her, earth
make love to Ruthie
stake her to hot lunches in the wheat fields
make bunches of purple ravens
fly out in formation, over her eyes
and let her newest lovers
be gentle as women
and longer lasting

Asking

for

Ruthie

Detroit

that old lady who
lived in shoes
remember, over
breeding, under
feeding her
toe children
crammed together
in the stinking
footgear she, she
burned it all down
yesterday her
shoe my
shoe anybody's
old black shoe

why do Americans
hate to sit next to each other
if you have 8 park benches and
18 people
10 will stand up
10 will stand up and stare past the pigeons
who never sit by themselves
1 ant plus
another ant make a community but
200 million Americans make one large ant eater
climbing up to the sandia caves I
thought about our ancestors
how scruffy and strong their
toes must have been, to scrabble in those rocks
I cannot do anything with my toes
even fingers grow only on harpsichordists

we have already forgotten
what mattered about them
the anthropologists who stripped the caves
of all nonessentials
being able to resurrect
their simplicity and their
joy
make busy diagrams of bones and broken dishes

did they go barefoot in the snow
did it burn them
I believe
they held onto each other with their toes
we are not allowed to go barefoot
it is no longer allowed to be snowing

there was a time the dead looked
dead
you could tell them from the living
a man who began to perish in those caves
need not wait half a century for it to finish
there is something to be said for not living
indefinitely
nowadays a man who puts a bullet into his head
is liable to be breathing 10 years later
suckled with needles and tubes
and the clinical curiosity of strangers
there was no capsule in that time
to protect them from love or violence
and if a neighboring tribesman
zonked you on the head and
ate your brains
it was a meaningful sacrifice
you would have done the same
nobody I know has tried to eat a medal of honor

I would crawl up the cliff face to meet the old people
but I having died 7 times already
except for the grace of
penicillin
should have been laid long ago
on the rimrock
to burn in the snow
they had no need for childless women
as we have not much need for mothers
what we need are more park benches
and fewer pigeons
who do not sit by themselves

we who have no darkness
to build fires in
shall go on lopping off the animal parts
we cannot use any more
until we are all shaped like craniums
God will notice the world rolling
with eggs
who cannot reproduce themselves
my ancestors
I would crawl up the cliff face
to meet you
but my toes are misshapen
we are all born with shoes on

Beside the bench

the tipped milk carton

is orange

the ants line

1

1

1

are not orange

paper clips on the ground

are not orange

waiting to walk away

my foot

is a brown boot with feathers

orange

the centipede's poem

I never asked the reason
some are yellow owls
and some howl
I never asked an accounting of legs
or heart chambers
we walked out of the sea
on whatever we had to walk on
and some stayed in
there is every kind of animal
that there is
and neither the moon nor the man nor
the mango tree
answers it
I never asked why mice in a woodpile
were not me
I eat whatever I
eat go where I go and
sit quite still
breathing



in the place where
her breasts come together
two thumbs' width of
channel ride my
eyes to anchor
hands to angle
in the place where
her legs come together
I said 'you smell like the
ocean' and lay down my tongue
beside the dark tooth edge
of sleeping
'swim' she told me and I
did, I did

fortunately the skins

peel back to let

us in

feelings of pulp moving

under the mouth who finds

how sweet to be

how blonde your

hips fit

I kiss your

ears your blood

bangs into my

love my life

beats

sing it

fortunately the skins shout

tambourine speeches

we understand

brush of your hair in

my ears who find your

belly a white drum thumping

snare to come upon how

blonde you are

I suck your

lips your teeth

bite into my

life my red love

take it

A History of Lesbianism

How they came into the world,
the women-loving-women
came in three by three
and four by four
the women-loving-women
came in ten by ten
and ten by ten again
until there were more
than you could count

they took care of each other
the best they knew how
and of each other's children,
if they had any.

How they lived in the world,
the women-loving-women
learned as much as they were allowed
and walked and wore their clothes
the way they liked
whenever they could. They did whatever
they knew to be happy or free
and worked and worked and worked.
The women-loving-women
in America were called dykes
and some liked it
and some did not.

they made love to each other
the best they knew how
and for the best reasons

How they went out of the world,
the women-loving-women
went out one by one
having withstood greater and lesser
trials, and much hatred
from other people, they went out
one by one, each having tried
in her own way to overthrow
the rule of men over women,
they tried it one by one
and hundred by hundred,
until each came in her own way
to the end of her life
and died.

The subject of lesbianism
is very ordinary; it's the question
of male domination that makes everybody
angry.



one August morning
the mockingbird announced
that the night rains
had driven up
a thousand easy worms
and drowned all the cats
on earth

24. *Thymus* *Worm*



THE COMMON WOMAN

I. Helen, at 9 am, at noon, at 5:15

Her ambition is to be more shiny
and metallic, black and purple as
a thief at midday; trying to make it
in a male form, she's become as
stiff as possible.

Wearing trim suits and spike heels,
she says "bust" instead of breast;
somewhere underneath she
misses love and trust, but she feels
that spite and malice are the
prices of success. She doesn't realize
yet, that she's missed success, also,
so her smile is sometimes still
genuine. After a while she'll be a real
killer, bitter and more wily, better at
pitting the men against each other
and getting the other women fired.
She constantly conspires.

Her grief expresses itself in fits of fury
over details, details take the place of meaning,
money takes the place of life.

She believes that people are lice
who eat her, so she bites first; her
thirst increases year by year and by the time
the sheen has disappeared from her black hair,
and tension makes her features unmistakably
ugly, she'll go mad. No one in particular
will care. As anyone who's had her for a boss
will know

the common woman is as common
as the common crow.

II. Ella, in a square apron, along Highway 80

She's a copperheaded waitress,
tired and sharp-worded, she hides
her bad brown tooth behind a wicked
smile, and flicks her ass
out of habit, to fend off the pass
that passes for affection.
She keeps her mind the way men
keep a knife — keen to strip the game
down to her size. She has a thin spine,
swallows her eggs cold, and tells lies.
She slaps a wet rag at the truck drivers
if they should complain. She understands
the necessity for pain, turns away
the smaller tips, out of pride, and
keeps a flask under the counter. Once,
she shot a lover who misused her child.
Before she got out of jail, the courts had pounced
and given the child away. Like some isolated lake,
her flat blue eyes take care of their own stark
bottoms. Her hands are nervous, curled, ready
to scrape.
The common woman is as common
as a rattlesnake.

III. Nadine, resting on her neighbor's stoop

She holds things together, collects bail,
makes the landlord patch the largest holes.
At the Sunday social she would spike
every drink, and offer you half of what she knows,
which is plenty. She pokes at the ruins of the city
like an armored tank; but she thinks
of herself as a rip saw cutting through
knots in wood. Her sentences come out
like thick pine shanks
and her big hands fill the air like smoke.
She's a mud-chinked cabin in the slums,
sitting on the doorstep counting
rats and raising 15 children,
half of them her own. The neighborhood
would burn itself out without her;
one of these days she'll strike the spark herself.
She's made of grease
and metal, with a hard head
that makes the men around her seem frail.
The common woman is as common as
a nail.

IV. Carol, in the park, chewing on straws

She has taken a woman lover
whatever shall we do
she has taken a woman lover
how lucky it wasnt you

And all the day through she smiles and lies
and grits her teeth and pretends to be shy,
or weak, or busy. Then she goes home
and pounds her own nails, makes her own
bets, and fixes her own car, with her friend.
She goes as far
as women can go without protection
from men.

On weekends, she dreams of becoming a tree;
a tree that dreams it is ground up
and sent to the paper factory, where it
lies helpless in sheets, until it dreams
of becoming a paper airplane, and rises
on its own current; where it turns into a
bird, a great coasting bird that dreams of becoming
more free, even, than that — a feather, finally, or
a piece of air with lightning in it.

she has taken a woman lover
whatever can we say

She walks around all day
quietly, but underneath it
she's electric;
angry energy inside a passive form.
The common woman is as common
as a thunderstorm.



V. Detroit Annie, hitchhiking

Her words pour out as if her throat were a broken
artery and her mind were cut-glass, carelessly handled.
You imagine her in a huge velvet hat with great
dangling black feathers,
but she shaves her head instead
and goes for three-day midnight walks.
Sometimes she goes down to the dock and dances
off the end of it, simply to prove her belief
that people who cannot walk on water
are phonies, or dead.
When she is cruel, she is very, very
cool and when she is kind she is lavish.
Fishermen think perhaps she's a fish, but they're all
fools. She figured out that the only way
to keep from being frozen was to
stay in motion, and long ago converted
most of her flesh into liquid. Now when she
smells danger, she spills herself all over,
like gasoline, and lights it.
She leaves the taste of salt and iron
under your tongue, but you dont mind.
The common woman is as common
as the reddest wine.

VI. Margaret, seen through a picture window

After she finished her first abortion
she stood for hours and watched it spinning in the
toilet, like a pale stool.

Some distortion of the rubber
doctors with their simple tubes and
complicated prices,
still makes her feel guilty.

White and yeasty.

All her broken bubbles push her down
into a shifting tide, where her own face
floats above her like the whole globe.

She lets her life go off and on
in a slow strobe.

At her last job she was fired for making
strikes, and talking out of turn;
now she stays home, a little blue around the edges.

Counting calories and staring at the empty
magazine pages, she hates her shape
and calls herself overweight.

Her husband calls her a big baboon.

Lusting for changes, she laughs through her
teeth, and wanders from room to room.

The common woman is as solemn as a monkey
or a new moon.

VII. Vera, from my childhood

Solemnly swearing, to swear as an oath to you
who have somehow gotten to be a pale old woman;
swearing, as if an oath could be wrapped around your shoulders
like a new coat:

For your 28 dollars a week and the bastard boss
you never let yourself hate;
and the work, all the work you did at home
where you never got paid;
For your mouth that got thinner and thinner
until it disappeared as if you had choked on it,
watching the hard liquor break your fine husband down
into a dead joke.

For the strange mole, like a third eye
right in the middle of your forehead;
for your religion which insisted that people
are beautiful golden birds and must be preserved;
for your persistent nerve
and plain white talk —
the common woman is as common
as good bread
as common as when you couldnt go on
but did.

For all the world we didnt know we held in common
all along
the common woman is as common as the best of bread
and will rise
and will become strong — I swear it to you
I swear it to you on my own head
I swear it to you on my common
woman's
head



the big horse woman
walked out to the mountain
it was early in the morning
nobody was around

she was carrying a blanket
and she spread it on the ground
she sat down hard upon it
and made a moaning sound

the mountain wind was blowing
and she shuddered once or twice
as she pressed down on her belly
that was cold, and blue as ice

red was above the mountain
and red was in her eyes
and red the water running
on the big horse woman's thighs

a herd of speckled ponies
came up the hill behind
with four mares at the head
and two horse colts behind

and when she stood up finally
she smiled like a rising sun
and whatever she had on her mind
she didnt tell no one

this poem is called
how Naomi gets her period